

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (currently amended)        A method for authenticating a transaction comprising the steps of:  
  
   presenting a nonce stamp having a nonce, wherein the nonce comprises a relatively unique number that substantially prevents a single user from accumulating multiple nonce stamps bearing the same nonce;  
  
   presenting a ~~numbered~~ digital certificate derived securely from the nonce; and  
  
   authenticating the transaction by comparing ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate and the nonce.
2. (original)    The method of Claim 1, wherein the nonce is represented on the nonce stamp within a bar code.
3. (original)    The method of Claim 1, wherein the digital certificate is marked on a physical medium.
4. (currently amended)        The method of Claim 1, wherein ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate is represented within a two dimensional bar code.
5. (currently amended)        The method of Claim 1, wherein the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate is derived by encrypting the nonce ~~number~~.
6. (currently amended)        The method of Claim 5, wherein comparing ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate and the nonce comprises encrypting the nonce, and matching the encrypted nonce against ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate.

7. (currently amended) The method of Claim 5, wherein comparing ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate comprises decrypting ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate and matching the decrypted ~~number~~ digital certificate with the nonce.

8. (original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising obtaining the digital certificate for a user by paying a purchase price for the transaction.

9. (original) The method of Claim 8, wherein obtaining the digital certificate is performed remotely via an electronic communications network.

10. (original) The method of Claim 9, wherein the user is in physical possession of the nonce stamp, and wherein obtaining the digital certificate for the user further comprises remotely transmitting the nonce.

11. (currently amended) The method of Claim 10, wherein obtaining the digital certificate further comprises deriving ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate by encrypting the nonce remotely transmitted for the user.

12. (currently amended) The method of Claim 11, wherein obtaining the digital certificate further comprises transmitting digital certificate information, including ~~the number on~~ the digital certificate, to the user via the electronic communications network.

13. (currently amended) The method of Claim 12, wherein obtaining the digital certificate further comprises receiving the digital certificate information and locally printing a tangible copy of the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate.

14. (original) The method of Claim 8, wherein obtaining the digital certificate is performed using a tamper-resistant module at a system local to the user, the tamper-resistant storing user account information.

15. (original) The method of Claim 14, wherein the user connects electronically to a remote vendor in order to purchase credit for the user account stored by the tamper resistant module.

16. (original) The method of Claim 15, wherein the vendor remotely updates, via electronic network, the account information in the tamper-resistant module.

17. (currently amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate further comprises a description of at least one element of the transaction selected from the group consisting of purchase price, purchased product/service, transaction authority.

18. (currently amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein the nonce stamp and the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate are physically coupled together.

19. (currently amended) The method of Claim 18, wherein the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate is printed on the nonce stamp.

20. (currently amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein the nonce stamp and the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate are physically coupled to an article of the transaction.

21. (currently amended) The method of Claim 1 wherein the transaction comprises depositing an article of mailing, and the method further comprises presenting the nonce stamp and the ~~numbered~~ digital certificate as postage for the article of mailing.

22. (original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the transaction comprises admission to a facility, and the method further comprises presenting the digital certificate and the nonce stamp as a ticket for admission to the facility.

Claims 23-49 (canceled)